



LOW HANGING FRUIT

Bring Your Lessons to Life with Primary Sources

By Allison Floyd

Looking for a fun, interesting, and easy way to engage your students with what you're teaching? Look no further! Primary sources are everywhere, and they add depth and dimension to any topic.

Wikipedia defines a primary source as "an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording, or any other source of information that was created at the time under study".



Sure, the Library of Congress looks grand, but it's also a valuable supplier of primary sources!

Think about it—you could lecture about the Harlem Renaissance (for example!), or you could bring it to life with photographs, recordings, newspaper articles, and even hand-marked drafts of a Langston Hughes poem: <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/harlem-renaissance/>. This is just one of many primary source sets available from the Library of Congress, along with lesson plans and suggestions for teachers, and additional historical background for context.

And the Library of Congress isn't the only show in town! Check out Links to More Learning and Digital Tools, to the right, for more great purveyors of primary sources! And don't stop there—you can even have your students try their hand at making their own (see Practical Applications).

We here at the ICfL are in fact so enthused about primary sources that we even applied for—and obtained!—a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant, with the goal of facilitating sessions devoted to this topic for interested schools and school libraries. While the ongoing pandemic has thrown a bit of a wrench in that plan, we're still hoping to make this available when things have settled down. For more information, please reach out to our school library consultant at jeannie.standal@libraries.idaho.gov.

There are as many ways to incorporate primary sources into your classroom as there are primary sources! Make your lessons more real, and provide students with a valuable opportunity to assess information directly from the source by incorporating pictures, articles, scores, recordings, political cartoons, letters, journals, or drawings (for starters!) into your lessons and watch them come alive!

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



Listen to a Teaching with Primary Sources Podcast!

Teacher-librarian, author, speaker, and podcaster, Tom Bober hosts The Primary Source Podcast available at your favorite source for podcasts. It is just good luck that he works at RM Captain school and so can legitimately use the Twitter handle @CaptainLibrary. Your school library may have a copy of his book in the collection!

Join a Primary Source Discussion Group

The TPS Consortium through the Library of Congress is for those who have already dipped a toe in to primary sources and are ready to dive into the deep end. It is free to join.

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/about-this-program/teaching-with-primary-sources-partner-program/tps-consortium/>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Explore the Primary Source Sets at LOC!

The Library of Congress has made it easy to get started with primary sources by developing sets around a number of subjects and developing lesson plans around them. There are guides, tools, and instructions to support teachers who are using these resources, and they even host virtual sessions for both students and teachers. Check out their professional development section— they even have Teacher In Residence Programs!

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/about-this-program/>

DIGITAL TOOLS



World Book Advanced

This online encyclopedia, geared toward high school and beyond, offers lesson plans focusing on primary source images. To access, choose Educator Tools from the dropdown Research & Resources menu on the top left, then select Teaching with Documents. Find political cartoons and posters, U.S. history, world culture, and more!

<https://lili.org/dbs/world-book-advanced/>



